

J Raptor Res. 26(2):97-98

© 1992 The Raptor Research Foundation, Inc.

LONG-EARED OWLS USURP NEWLY CONSTRUCTED AMERICAN CROW NESTS

BRIAN D. SULLIVAN¹

*Department of Animal Ecology, 124 Science II, Iowa State University,
Ames, IA 50011*

Long-eared Owls (*Asio otus*) use old nests of other birds (Marks 1986); however, I found no reports of Long-eared Owls using newly constructed nests of other birds. Here, I document three instances of Long-eared Owls usurping newly constructed American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) nests, and three additional instances of owls nesting in close proximity to crows.

My observations were made during a study of crows near Minnedosa in southwestern Manitoba, Canada (Sullivan 1988, Sullivan and Dinsmore 1990). I found six Long-eared Owl nests in 1986, five in 1987, and one in 1988 while searching woodlots for crow nests during April-June. I made no special efforts to locate or monitor owl nests.

OBSERVATIONS

Nest Usurpations. On 29 April 1986, I saw two crows calling near a small, willow-fringed (*Salix* sp.) wetland. I found a nest on which a Long-eared Owl apparently was incubating eggs. I checked the vicinity of this nest daily, but did not observe crows at the site again until 6 May. On that day, the nest that had been occupied previously by the owl contained three crow eggs. I concluded that the nest had been constructed by crows during the current season; the nest contained twigs with freshly broken ends, indicating it was newly constructed (Good 1952). I also found white eggshell fragments, characteristic of owl eggs, at the base of the nest tree. I concluded that a predator had depredated the owl's clutch and that the crows had reoccupied their own nest. I observed crows near this site daily until 9 May. On 13 May, I found that the crow clutch had been depredated.

On 6 May 1987, I noted crow activity near another small, willow-fringed wetland. I found a newly constructed crow nest without eggs. Crows were in the area on 12 and 14 May. On 17 May, a Long-eared Owl flushed from the nest containing three owl eggs. I found no evidence of crow eggs being laid in this nest and concluded that the owls had usurped the nest before egg laying by the crows. The crows constructed another nest approximately 100 m away and laid a clutch that was subsequently destroyed by a predator.

On 8 June 1988, I found a newly constructed crow nest in willows near a small wetland. I flushed a Long-eared Owl from the nest containing three newly hatched owlets and one egg. A pair of crows was nearby, calling and acting agitated. I thoroughly searched the surrounding woody cover to a radius of several hundred meters but did not find another crow nest.

Nesting in Close Proximity. In three separate instances during 1986 and 1987 I observed Long-eared Owls nesting in old crow nests at distances of 40, 35, and 5 m from attended crow nests. I observed no interactions between the owls and the crows during repeated inspections of the crow nests.

DISCUSSION

These observations seem to be the first published reports of Long-eared Owls usurping newly constructed nests of other birds. Where owls nested in close proximity to crows, one or more old crow nests were present in the immediate vicinity. Old crow nests were not present where usurpations occurred. Owls evidently will use old crow nests if available, but seemingly will usurp newly constructed nests if old nests are unavailable.

All usurpations of newly constructed crow nests took place before egg laying by the crows. There is a short interval (ca. 5 d) between nest completion and clutch initiation (Ignatiuk and Clark 1991), and crows are not as attentive to their nest sites before egg laying as they are later in the nesting cycle (pers. observation). Opportunities for nest usurpation by owls likely would be greatest before egg laying by crows.

Long-eared Owls also have been reported nesting within 50 m of crows in Saskatchewan, Canada (R.G. Clark pers. comm.). I found no reports in the literature of Long-eared Owl predation on crows (e.g., Bull et al. 1989). With the exception of occasional competition for nests, the lack of observed interactions between owls and crows nesting in close proximity suggests that these birds can coexist neutrally.

RESUMEN.—Entre 1986 y 1988 he documentado tres instancias en que búhos de la especie *Asio otus* usurparon nidos recientemente contruídos por cuervos de la especie *Corvus brachyrhynchos* en el sudoeste de Manitoba, Canada. También documenté otros tres casos en que búhos de esta especie anidaron a una distancia entre 5 y 40 m. de nidos activos de estos cuervos.

[Traducción de Eudoxio Paredes-Ruiz]

¹ Present address: Missouri Department of Conservation, Fish and Wildlife Research Center, 1110 S. College Ave., Columbia, MO 65201.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These observations were made during a study supported by the North American Wildlife Foundation, through the Delta Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Station, and Iowa State University, through the Department of Animal Ecology, the Iowa Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, and the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station. I thank R.G. Clark, J.J. Dinsmore, D.L. Evans, and D.W. Holt for commenting on the manuscript, J.M. Buenger for assistance reviewing literature, and R.G. Clark, K.G. Devries, and J.B. Ignatiuk for sharing field observations. This is Journal Paper No. J-14579 of the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, Ames, IA, Project No. 2466.

LITERATURE CITED

BULL, E.L., A.L. WRIGHT AND M.G. HENJUM. 1989. Nesting and diet of Long-eared Owls in conifer forests, Oregon. *Condor* 91:908-912.

GOOD, E.E. 1952. The life history of the American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos* Brehm. Ph.D. thesis, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

IGNATIUK, J.B. AND R.G. CLARK. 1991. Breeding biology of American Crows in Saskatchewan parkland habitat. *Can. J. Zool.* 69:168-175.

MARKS, J.S. 1986. Nest-site characteristics and reproductive success of Long-eared Owls in southwestern Idaho. *Wilson Bull.* 98:547-560.

SULLIVAN, B.D. 1988. Egg predation, home range, and foraging habitat of American Crows in a waterfowl breeding area. M.S. thesis, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.

——— AND J.J. DINSMORE. 1990. Factors affecting egg predation by American Crows. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 54: 433-437.

Received 20 August 1991; accepted 18 February 1992